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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

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The Hollywood Freeway, looking west from Civic Center**

PROFILE OF LOS ANGELES

By W. W. ROBINSON*

It has always been easy to look at the towering skyline of New York or to look at San Francisco sitting serenely on her hills and get single, quick impressions of these two cities — impressions with which everyone is in agreement.

Los Angeles, on the other hand, has always been hard to look at — literally. Los Angeles does not come easily into focus. Its profile has been illusive.

Back in 1930 a popular magazine writer, Garet Garrett, looked at our sprawling 450 square miles and said, "There is no Los Angeles face." He was right, for a drive through our city streets could leave only confused impressions.

**An informal lecture presented at the 1954 Annual Luncheon of the Museum Association of the Los Angeles County Museum.*

***Photos courtesy of Title Insurance and Trust Company.*

Today, because of the brand new element of freeways, the face, the profile of Los Angeles is beginning to be clear, sharp in outline. Prove it for yourself by riding the highflung Hollywood Freeway from Hollywood to the Civic Center — the freeway which, as Bob Hope cracked at the ceremony of its completion, "helps California drivers get to their accidents quicker." Take the intersecting Harbor Freeway, now getting into its mighty stride. Try the Ramona Freeway and race out into the middle of Los Angeles County. Travel the Santa Ana Freeway and get a look at expanding industry. At fifty-five miles an hour look over your new city of Los Angeles, the Metropolitan area of which now includes all of two counties: Los Angeles and Orange. Freeways give you an escape from the confines of the old streets, which were merely channels

between lines of telephone poles and squat buildings, with the motorist forever defeated by "Stop" and "Go." To you the face of Los Angeles is now revealed for the first time, its physical and architectural outlines, its color, its drabness, its beauty, its ugliness, its dark palms silhouetted against the sky, its familiar buildings that rise, to unfamiliar and startling stature, skylines that follow hill curves, a Hollywood that for the first time is fabulous — with a perpetual backdrop of mountains. This is true even when the outlines are dimmed by the smog that we must and shall conquer. Don't look too long though, or you'll prove Bob Hope's thesis.

But I have found a place in the center of this rushing freeway traffic where you can stand and get much more than a hasty glimpse. This place



Historic Fort Moore once occupied the hill shown in the center

is an island in the traffic. It is what the bulldozers have left of historic old Fort Moore Hill. It is not far from where the tides of the Hollywood Freeway intersect the tides of the Harbor and Arroyo Seco freeways. From the flat top of this hill, now occupied by buildings of the Los Angeles Board of Education, you can look down upon the rushing present, see constant reminders of the past — for Los Angeles was born close by — and foresee what is to come. The profile then becomes something to which the past, the present, and the future all contribute.

And because I am equally interested in these three contributing elements, I like to stand on this Fort Moore Hill, look beyond the rivers of traffic, beyond the vast and gleaming acres of parked cars, and see below me the cluster of dark trees which mark the old Plaza. I know that the Plaza is still faced by a cream-colored church through whose "River of Life" door passed the illustrious ones of Spanish and Mexican days. I know a statue stands in the Plaza which honors Spanish Governor Felipe de Neve under whose instructions the Pueblo of Los Angeles was founded. While the traffic roars up to me I don't forget that first evening on September 4, 1781, when eleven families of colonists from old Mexico sat about their camp fires above the Los Angeles River, near the present Plaza, and talked of the morning's trip from San Gabriel and of the snug houses, the good stock and the products of the fields that soon would be theirs.

Watching the swift flow of the Hollywood Freeway as it crosses the Pueblo area of yesterday, I can call to mind the Plaza of 1840 when Los Angeles was the hub of the ranchos and the trading, shopping, and social center of Southern California's cattle country. It is a plaza dominated by the same church, but faced by the townhouses of rancheros

The Founding of Los Angeles, 1781. A Los Angeles County Museum Diorama



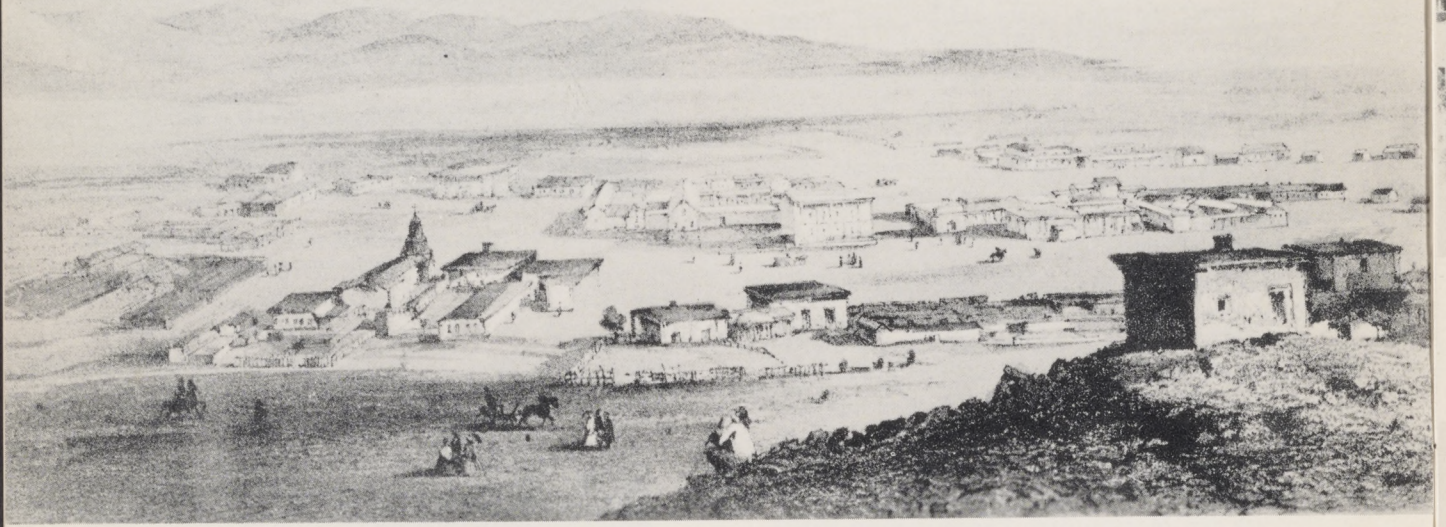
The Plaza, about 1890, watched over by Fort Moore in the background.



The Plaza Church, 1885

Statue of Felipe de Neve in Los Angeles Plaza





Los Angeles, the trading and social center of the ranchos, looked like this during the early 1850's.

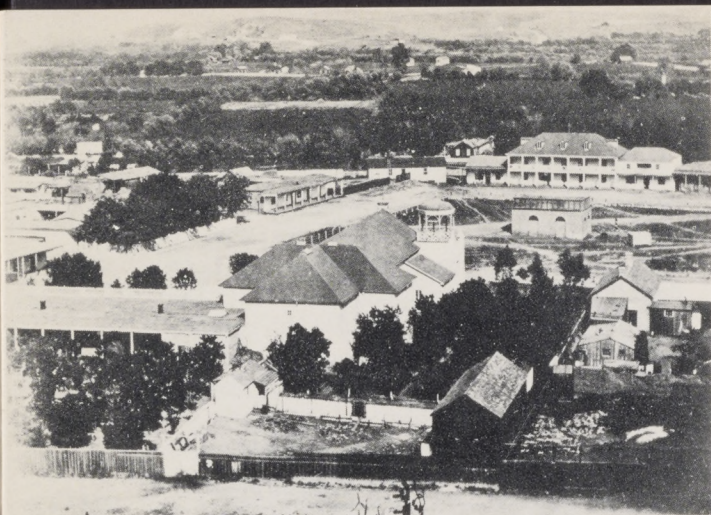
and surrounded by a sun-baked village of one-story adobe houses and shops. From this Plaza I see dusty lanes extending out like the spokes of a lopsided wheel. Down these lanes that connect the great ranchos of a pastoral era horsemen gallop, for *Californios* always rode at a gallop. These lanes have become our streets and highways of today.

Advance the calendar from 1840 to a certain August day in 1846 and I see and hear a brass band playing in the Plaza. It is the band of Commodore Robert F. Stockton which had marched with sailors and marines, and with the soldiers of John C. Frémont, into a seemingly deserted Pueblo. They had marched to the tune of "Hail Columbia" and "Yankee Doodle." The band concert was an experiment on the part of the invading Americans. Spanish Californians were extravagantly fond of music. With the first notes, wide-eyed children ventured down the hill — my hill — which overlooked the Plaza. As the lively tunes continued, older people followed or came out of their darkened homes. Before the concert was over there was a circle of delighted *Californios*, and their *vivas* were many. The next day, at sunset, when there was another hour of music, an old priest, who sat at the door of the Plaza Church and who had not heard band music since he left Spain fifty years before, said: "Ah! That music will do more service in the conquest of California than a thousand bayonets."

Of course the conquest was not as peaceful as I have indicated by this pretty picture. The Mexican War was fought and won south of the Rio Grande, rather than in California. But men were killed in California, some by medieval, nine-foot lances carried by fast-riding Californians at San Pascual.

The rancho age did not end with the passing of Mexican rule in California. In fact it has its most extravagant flowering in the 1850's when the price of beef skyrocketed, due to demands of Gold Rush miners. Los Angeles, between 1849 and 1857, was a booming, gambling, roistering town, as proud of its sin as of its sunshine, and wickeder, it boasted, than San Francisco. With the bursting of the boom, and the drop in cattle prices, followed by terrible drought years in the early 1860's, the rancho period really ended and Spanish California ownership passed largely to American-born merchants, lenders, subdividers and settlers.

I have no intention of telling the history of Los Angeles; only some highlights suggested by standing today atop Fort Moore Hill, highlights that bring out the profile of Los Angeles. The spread of railroad lines below, fanning northward from the Union Station and carrying passengers up the coast, or through the San Joaquin Valley, or east into the desert, brings to mind the entry of the railroad into Los Angeles in 1876. This railroad, the Southern Pacific, ended isolation and opened up un-



The Plaza, 1869



The Pico House, 1870



The Plaza, 1876

California tourists arriving from the East, 1885



Union Station today



limited possibilities. When the Santa Fe Railroad reached Los Angeles in 1885 and engaged in a rate war with the Southern Pacific the result was our greatest real estate boom, the present pattern of towns and subdivisions, and an immigrant flood that still is unabated.

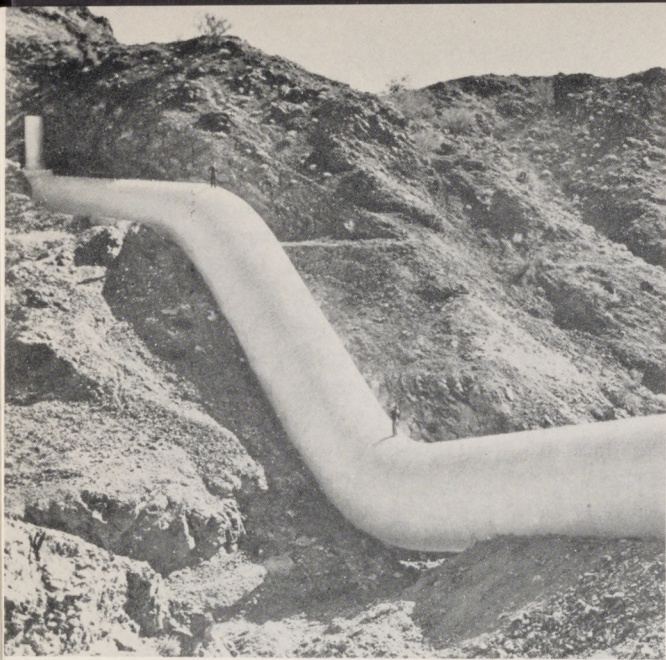
The Los Angeles River cannot be seen today from Fort Moore Hill, not even the cement-lined channel that keeps its trickle a prisoner. Its bridges, however, are visible, beyond the blue-gray lines of streets and freeways. Its former bed is occupied by a grim confusion of moving trains, trackage, warehouses, freight depots, gas tanks, the Union Station, the Terminal Annex Post Office, and a somber one-two- and three-storied miscellany of red and yellow structures. But the river was there once. It found its way in from the San Fernando Valley, winding twelve months a year for countless thousands of years through the fertile Los Angeles Valley thick

with willow growth and sycamore, shaping the land and using now one mouth and now another or merely flooding the landscape. In pre-Spanish days the river drew bands of Shoshonean Indians down the Owens Valley to take over the Los Angeles County region and to establish brush-hut villages, such as Yang-na, where water was easily got. These Indians greeted the first party of white men — men having "nasty, white color and . . . ugly, blue eyes," to use the Shoshonean description. These white men were of the Portolá party which, coming up from the port of San Diego crossed the Los Angeles River in August, 1769. It was the river, too, which drew the first settlers and caused the founding of the farming community of El Pueblo.

Today's thoughts of the unseen river remind me of the later water problems of this region and of the titanic and successful engineering feats required to supplement Los Angeles River water with im-

Portola reaches the site of Los Angeles, August, 1769. A Los Angeles County Museum Diorama





An inverted siphon section of the Metropolitan Water District



San Pedro Harbor, 1885

Los Angeles Harbor today





Oil wells in Los Angeles, near Glendale Boulevard and Second Street, 1904

portations from the Owens River and the Mono Basin watershed, in the Sierra Nevada, and from the Colorado River. What has become of the Los Angeles River? We're drinking it, for its tapped sources and underground flow still give Los Angeles twenty-two per cent of its water.

The curve of the Harbor Freeway now speeding its course toward the sea makes one think inevitably of the Los Angeles Harbor twenty miles away. When the population of Los Angeles had jumped to 50,000 in 1890, the city so badly needed a deep-water harbor that it built one out of mud flats, though it took an eight-year battle in Congress to defeat interests favoring Santa Monica. Today it is one of the important ports of the world and provides an outlet for Southern California and the Southwest.

Venice Oil Fields

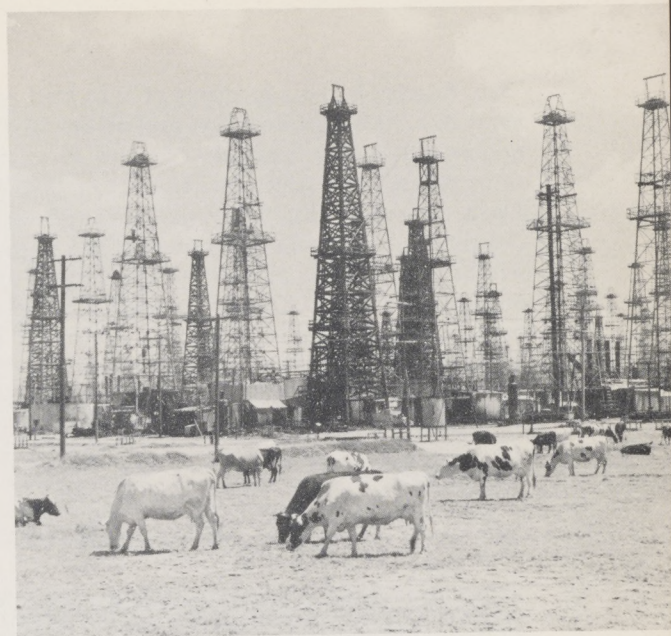


Our hilly island, Fort Moore Hill, reveals a distant glimpse of a few old wooden oil derricks. These are hangovers from the discovery made by E. L. Doheny in the early 1890's that Los Angeles was sitting on a fat reservoir of oil. His oil find was no great distance away and these vestigial derricks are of the discovery period. Presently the "Salt Lake field" in western Los Angeles was developed, followed by the fields of Huntington Beach, Santa Fe Springs, Signal Hill, and others. Population, agricultural activity, movie-making, all year-round industrialism — all can be explained by climate, but the happy finding of oil is something else.

Fort Moore Hill offers no escape from the smog which too oftens stains and streaks the profile of Los Angeles. Smarting eyes are reminders of what has happened to us since World War II. When we got transcontinental rail connections in 1876 we began to yearn for industry. During World War II we really got industry. In one area alone — the Central Manufacturing District — many hundreds of industrial plants have taken over a large portion of Rancho San Antonio, former pride of a great cattleman, Antonio María Lugo, who symbolized in his outlook, in his dress, and in the way he rode a horse, the ranchero of Spanish and Mexican days. With the increase in heavy industry and with the presence of 2,100,000 automobiles came air pollution, smog, aerial waste, for which our mountains provide a trap. Much has been done to muzzle the industrial offender, but nothing to control the pollution caused by what seems now to be the major offender, the automobile. If, in fact, the automobile is the chief villain, the cure should not be beyond our inventors nor too far away. But, I ask, with the present rate of industrialization and of subdivision, will there be left, in another twenty years, a single orange grove, or a walnut orchard, or an open field, or a chaparral-covered hill slope in the whole metropolitan district? Will there be any easily accessible areas left where a reflective man or woman can find relish or restoration of the spirit?

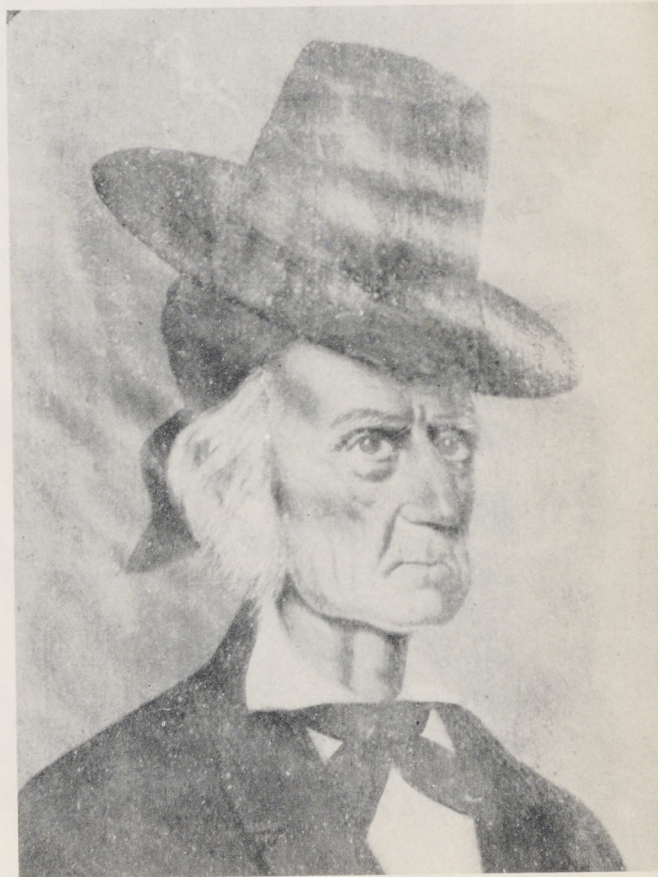
Regardless of problems, however, the profile of Los Angeles, because of our freeways, at long last comes into focus. The freeway, I agree with Bill Henry, is the greatest thing that has happened to us, as a city — an automobile dominated city — and, of course, our freeway system, which carries the world's heaviest traffic, is only in its infancy. We can now begin to look at ourselves.

In so doing, we begin to find that unity which we have so notably lacked. Harry Carr once said:



The Norwalk Oil Field

Don Antonio Maria Lugo, grantee of Rancho San Antonio



"Los Angeles is the ingredients of a cocktail not yet shaken." Many visitors have said we are "six— or nineteen — or a hundred — suburbs in search of a city." A Los Angeles advertising man, Charles Levitt, commented that "Los Angeles has no heart." Presently, I believe, the commentators and visitors will have to find new phrases, for the freeways are binding us as a unit. They are giving Los Angeles unity, and ultimately, civic pride. Los Angeles is finding its center, its *heart*, at the intersection of the crosscurrents of traffic, close to where the Hollywood Freeway crosses the Harbor Freeway. Here

is the civic center of the future, and on the two hundred acres of old Pueblo areas near by are arising slowly one of the largest groupings of public buildings in the United States.

To wind up my history, my current description, and my prophecy, I really enjoy getting out on the freeways mornings and evenings. I like what magazine writer Frank J. Taylor described as "this daily joust with Fate . . . an accepted risk of living in sunny, smoggy Southern California." It is exhilarating, and always looming up is the profile of Los Angeles!

Where the Hollywood Freeway crosses the Harbor Freeway





Bay of Monterey in the 1830's, a drawing from Forbes' *California: A History of Upper and Lower California* (London, 1839), the first book on California written in English.

ZAMORANO FIRST EDITIONS

(Rare California Imprints)

One day, late in the spring of 1834, the *Lagoda*, a three hundred-forty ton sailing ship, out of Boston, dropped anchor off the shore in the Bay at Monterey. Although rusty and worn from "droghing" or carrying hides, her chief cargo consisted of supplies for the *presidio* such as lumber, clothing, hardware, harness and staple groceries. But to us, the most important item put ashore that day was:

1 Case, Printing Press, Type & Apparatus complete, and consigned to Don Agustin Vincente Zamorano.

Among the collections of the History Division of the Los Angeles County Museum is the important "Antonio Coronel Collection" which consists of the family archives. Don Ignacio Coronel, father of Antonio, is said to have opened the first school in Los Angeles and to have been a good friend of Agustin Zamorano. The widow of Antonio Coronel gave these archives to the Los Angeles Chamber

of Commerce and the Chamber subsequently deposited them at the Museum.

The "Coronel Collection" contains three of the earliest books printed on the Zamorano press. Since the first book, the *Reglamento*, is dated 1834, we can only guess that Don Agustin lost no time in putting his press into operation. The *Reglamento Provincial El Gobierno Interior De La Ecma. Diputacion Territorial De La Alta California* was the first major work from the new press. A second and larger book in the collection is the *Manifiesto A La Republica Mejicana* by Don José Figueroa, governor of California in 1834. The third book which was written and compiled by José Mariano Romero, is the *Catecismo De Ortologia. Dedicado a los Alumnos de la Escuela Normal de Monterrey*.

The Los Angeles County Museum Library has copies of the translations of the *Reglamento* and *Manifiesto*, as well as the biography of Don Agustin V. Zamorano by George L. Harding.

REGLAMENTO PROVINCIONAL

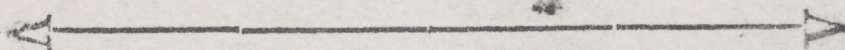
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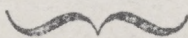
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MONTERREY 1834.



IMPRESA DE A. V. ZAMORANO Y C^a.

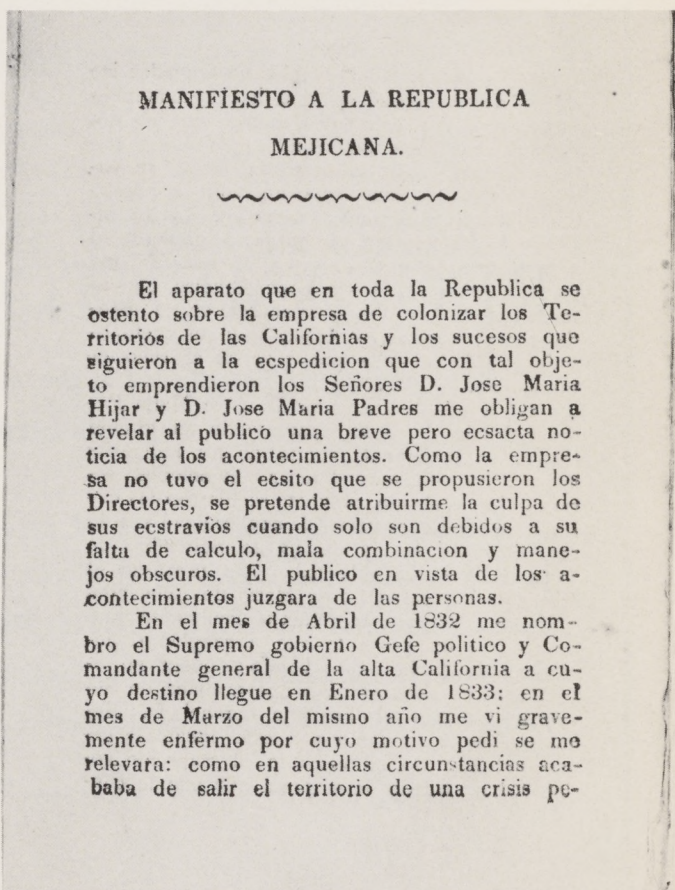
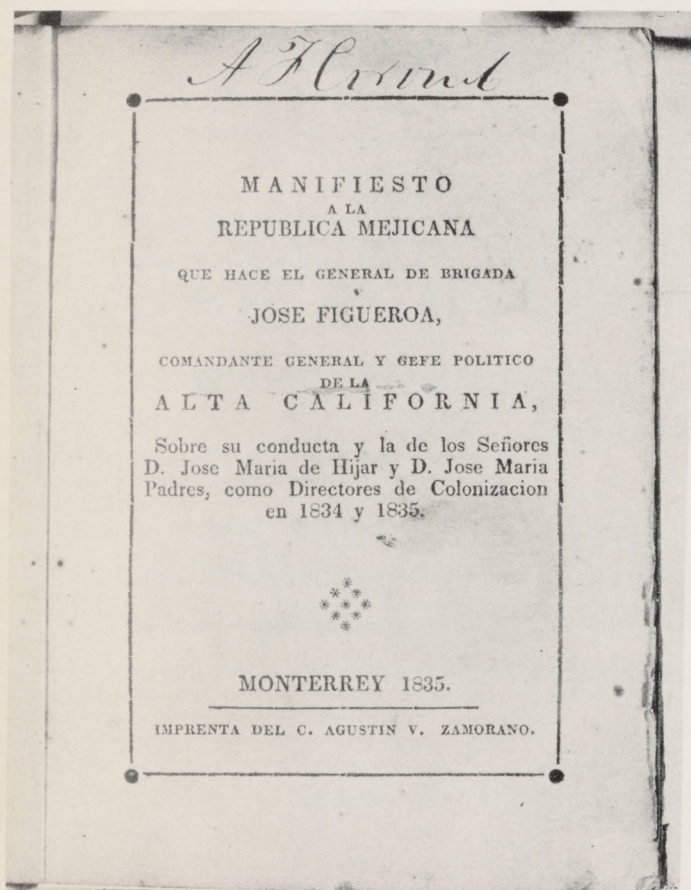
REGLAMENTO PROVINCIONAL

Rules and regulations adopted by the territorial legislature for the government of its
organization and sessions.

The Reglamento, from the press of Agustin V. Zamorano in 1934, was the first book to be printed in California. Consisting of sixteen pages and a title page, it is the first piece of California printing of more than one page. There are two copies known to exist today—one in the Coronel Collection in the Los Angeles County Museum and the other in the Bancroft Library at the University of California in Berkeley, California.

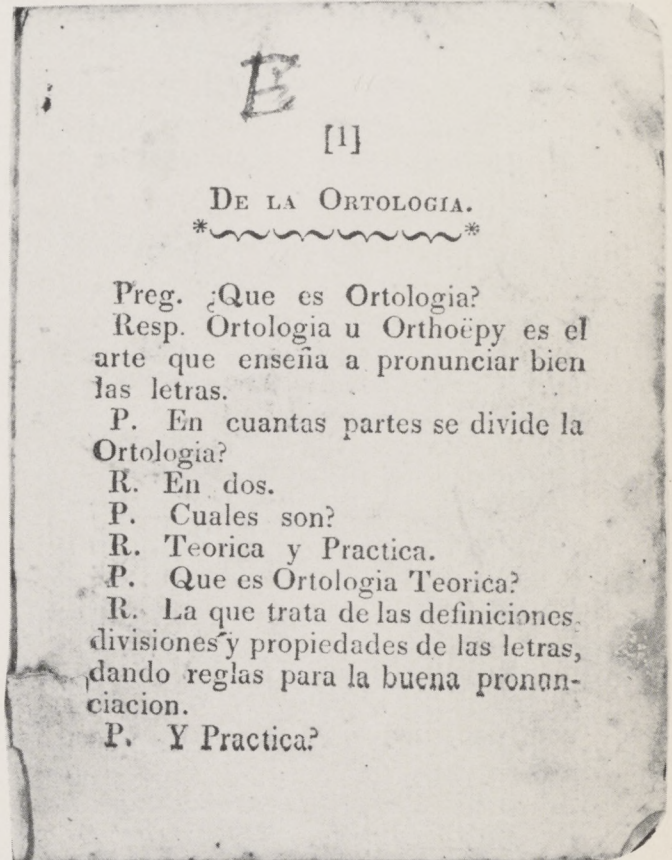
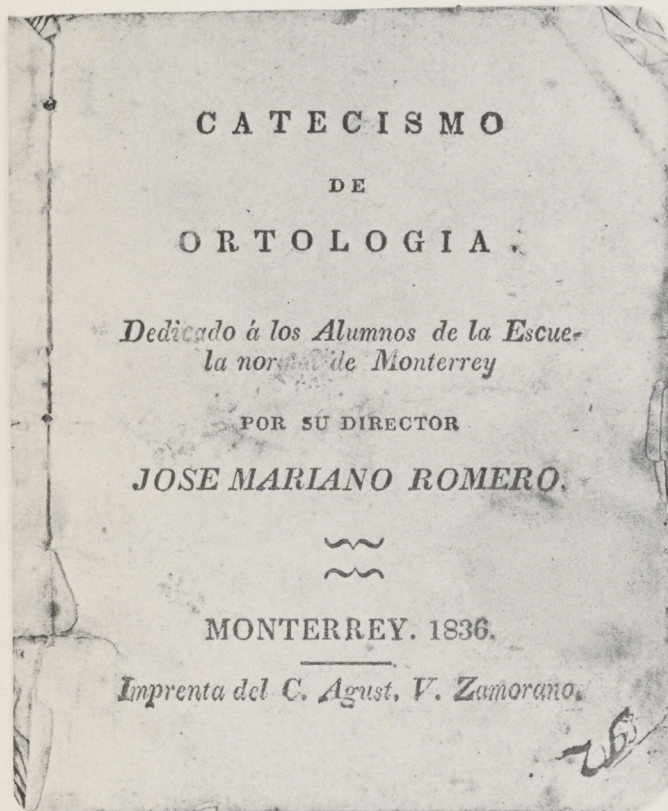
MANIFIESTO A LA REPUBLICA MEJICANA

Governor Figueroa's vindication of his policies in regard to the activities of Hjar and Padres.



The Manifesto, printed in 1835 by Agustin V. Zamorano, is the second book to come from his press. This volume of one hundred eighty-four pages was the only book of any size and importance to be produced in California before the American occupation. This book, in the Coronel Collection at the Los Angeles County Museum, is one of the very few remaining copies.

CATECISMO DE ORTOLOGIA



A catechism of spelling by Jose Mariano Romero, director of the Normal School in Monterey.

The Catecismo, dated 1836, was the first known school book published in California. It has been described as the first sixteen pages of an incomplete work. This booklet in the Coronel Collection in the Los Angeles County Museum is believed to be the only surviving copy.

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